

Surviving the Holidays

As the holidays approach, you may find yourself preparing for social gatherings and the joy, goodwill, and generosity that traditionally accompany them. Yet, during these traditional celebrations, grieving families often notice feelings of loneliness, stress, sadness, and longing for their loved ones who have died. It's normal to experience "holiday blues" on top of grief and loss. Here are some symptoms of grief and stress to watch out for:

- **Emotional signs** include fear, panic, guilt, rage, depression, numbness, crying, and moodiness.
- **Physical signs** include increased heart rate, changes in digestive track function, nausea, headaches, shaking, fatigue, changes in sleep (having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep), changes in appetite (eating more or less), difficulty concentrating, clumsiness, or forgetfulness.
- **Behavioral signs** include increased drinking or use of drugs, aggressive or reckless behavior, isolating from others, jumpiness, decreased interest in things you used to enjoy.

If you find yourself experiencing these reactions, you may find it helpful to take some time out for self-care. Every member of a donor family is unique; therefore, their wishes for the holidays, their grief, and their ways of coping with feelings are also unique. With this in mind, we hope the following suggestions may provide you with some comfort:

- Talk about your grief and share your memories with a trusted, caring person.
- Decide what you can comfortably handle without over scheduling yourself. Let others know if you need help. Keeping busy sometimes just delays your grief.
- Do things the same, different, or not at all. It's okay to continue family traditions or create new ones.
- Cry if you feel like crying. Laugh if you feel like laughing. Do both at the same time if it's what you feel. Ignoring your feelings takes more psychological energy than expressing your feelings.
- Go for a walk, exercise, spend time in nature, walk barefoot on the grass or sand, or just get some fresh air.
- Write, draw, or read to help you process your feelings and record memories.
- Meditate, pray, or explore your spirituality or your relationship with a higher power.
- Embrace your memories - include a memory of your loved one in your holiday cards or at a family gathering, place a box or basket near the door. As people arrive, ask them to write a memory on a piece of paper and leave it there. It may comfort you and encourage others to share their memories.
- Choose a candle, a single flower, or set a place at the table to honor your loved one.
- Share memories and special stories or create a scrapbook.
- Make a special wreath, candle, picture frame, or ornament as a memorial.
- Give a gift to a charity or church or purchase a book for your local library or school in honor of your loved one.
- "Adopt" a needy family as a way of honoring the person who has died.
- Find a grief support group or surviving-the-holidays workshop.
- Be kind to yourself – if you need quiet time alone, take it.

In this season of giving, remember that your loved one's gift was extraordinary – It was the gift of life, hope, and healing for others. We at OneLegacy will be thinking of you and wish you peace. If you are in need of additional support, please feel free to contact Family Services at 800-786-4077.